

Homily. 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year B. 13/14 January 2024.

It's a common turn of phrase for us to be described as sheep and lambs of God's flock, cared for and guided by God and by the Good Shepherd, Jesus. We find this sort of description, one amongst many by the way, in both the Old and New Testaments, so it has much history behind it.

The description of Jesus by John the Baptist as 'the Lamb of God' is ancient in its origins, too, and has a very specific meaning. It takes our thoughts back to the lamb without blemish sacrificed on the first Passover when the people were rescued from their slavery in Egypt and journeyed to the land of promise. A special lamb is still sacrificed and eaten at every Jewish Passover meal. This phrase also connects us to the words of the Prophet Isaiah who told of God's servant of suffering and sacrifice who would one day free us from falsehood and sin. This servant, this pure lamb, by his perfect self offering would finally put us at rights with God.

When John said to two of his disciples 'Look, there is Lamb of God' he was releasing them from following him and telling them to go and learn from Jesus, the new Rabbi and teacher that he has just baptised. The Baptist is letting go of his role, for what he had prepared for had arrived, the perfect lamb of God made flesh amongst us and given for us.

Jesus entire life and ministry prepared him for this moment, making him ready for his total dedication to God's will, wherein the Good Shepherd became the one who would lay down his life for the sake of his flock. In Jesus, the guarding and guiding shepherd is also the lamb who brings our salvation through the offering of himself for our benefit and well being. All

of this reached its climax on Calvary hill and after that Good Friday, it's fulfilment in the early light of the first Easter dawn.

Which brings us to the present and to this Mass, for it's all of this that we celebrate, reconnect with, renew and deepen here, day after day in the memorial Jesus Christ left for us. In fact we pinch John's words and this very phrase, so full of meaning, using it at every Eucharist when, after the consecrated sacramental bread is broken, the Priest says "Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those like us who are called to the supper of the lamb."

He is the Good Shepherd, so very good that he accepts being the lamb chosen from amongst us in order to be offered so as to put us and our world at rights with God and God's will. It's in God's Lamb that we have our communion with our Lord and with one another, for without his willing sacrifice and service we can have no peace and unity in our times, nor will the work of our redemption be accomplished or oneness in mind and heart ever be achieved.

Today we hear the Lamb of God speaking to those who want to follow him asking 'What do you want?' Hopefully we'll answer 'Where do you live' so that we can hear his invitation to come to him, see his way and learn from him how to live in his Spirit. In this way, like the Lamb of God who liberates people through the power of his faithful loving service, we'll be able to become for others the living presence of the goodness of God.